



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

A NOTE ON CYNEWULF'S *CHRIST*

Much controversy has centered around lines 558-585 of Cynewulf's *Christ*. They occur in the middle of the second part, which relates the story of Christ's Ascension. At first glance, it would appear that the passage is out of place and introduces a subject, the Harrowing of Hell, which has no connection with the Ascension.

The poet has described the gathering of the disciples on the mountain, the appearance of the white-robed host, and finally the Ascension itself. In accord with the gospel account, two angels remain behind to explain the scene to the awestruck people. This explanation (lines 517-526) is hardly more than a naïve amplification of *Acts* 1, 11. At line 527 the poet resumes the narrative and describes the return of the disciples to Jerusalem and the entrance of Christ into heaven. This would seem to be all that could be said about the incident of the Ascension, and we might next expect to hear the story of Pentecost.

Instead, however, with line 558 begins, what seems to me, beyond all controversy, a second explanation by the angels of the Ascension scene; this time emphasizing a feature which has been, at most, only hinted at in the two previous descriptions—the ascension with Christ of the patriarchs and prophets whom He had, after His death and before His resurrection, rescued from Limbo. This second speech of the angels is undoubtedly, like the first, directed to the disciples, who are represented as still staring into heaven after their vanishing Lord, in spite of the narrative of lines 527-557. Otherwise there is no meaning in the form of direct address and in the repeated *gē* of lines 570, 573, and 575; while the words *þe gē hēr on stariað* are not only reminiscent of *Acts* 1, 10, 11, but are also a repetition of line 521^b, where it is perfectly clear that the angel is speaking to the disciples; and to whom more appropriately can lines 575-576^a refer than to the disciples and to their return to Jerusalem? Moreover, the last part of the passage beginning at line 576^b must refer to Christ's leading the redeemed into heaven. The angel at this point of his explanation grows dramatic. With a memory of the *Attollite portas* cry of Christ when He harrowed hell (the event he has just described) he exclaims, as he

looks up to the gates of heaven, which Christ and the attendant angels and the redeemed are entering,

. geatu, ontȳnað;
 wile in tō ēow ealles Wāldend,
 Cyning on ceastre
 folc gelædan

in tō ēow and *on ceastre* can hardly be construed to mean anything other than the gates of the heavenly city and that city itself. The Earthly Paradise, whither the patriarchs and prophets were taken after the Harrowing of Hell, would hardly be spoken of in such terms.

But this does not dismiss the difficulties the editors have found in the passage. If lines 517-526 and lines 558-585 are both speeches of the angels, addressed to the disciples who are gazing after the ascending Christ, why are the passages separated by the narrative of events clearly subsequent to both? Professor Cook, in his notes, calls attention to other chronological lapses in this class of medieval compositions. To those familiar with the Greek and Latin homilists, of which this part of the *Christ* is reminiscent, the repetition and the ignoring of the exact order of events offer no difficulty.

But seemingly a discriminating artistic purpose prompted this transposition. After the Ascension scene had been pictured twice, there still remained one thing too important to be treated as a mere feature of a general description; for the Ascension of those rescued from hell was prophetic of the final ascension at the Last Judgment of all who believe in Christ. Yet if a third description followed directly on the other two, even the dramatic intensity and the new point of view could not save the poet from repetitious monotony. As it stands here, however, set off from the others by the story of the return to Jerusalem, while its intent and relationship is clear enough, its transposition brings in the element of surprise which enhances the value of the new point of view and makes this speech of the angels a distinct addition to the picture of the episode. The clue to the reason for this third description lies in the lines

Cyning on ceastre,
 folc gelædan
 þe hē on dēofum genōm.

This passage (lines 558-585) opens with a vigorous description of Christ's Harrowing of Hell, and the question has repeatedly been raised as to why these angels of the Ascension should go back and tell the story of the overthrow of Satan and the rescue of the souls from Limbo. The interpretation has been that, because the patriarchs and prophets ascended with Christ, their presence had to be explained to the disciples, who, of course, knew nothing of all that had previously taken place in Hell. The Ascension scene from the *Frankfurter Dirigierrolle*,¹ which I describe below, makes it absolutely plain to me that this is the connection between these two incidents. When I brought this part of the German Passion-play to the attention of Professor F. G. Hubbard, he agreed that nothing which has been hitherto brought forward as evidence so adequately and finally clears up the questions that have arisen with regard to these lines.

This *Frankfurter Dirigierrolle* is the manuscript of the stage directions and the *incipits* of the speeches (in Latin and in German vernacular) of a fourteenth-century Passion-play. After an introductory scene between S. Augustine, the prophets of Christ, and a group of Jews who question Christ's Messiahship, the play goes on to portray the life of Christ from the beginning of His ministry to His Ascension. In due course, immediately after the Crucifixion, the *Harrowing* is given in detail. Those rescued then are delivered over by Christ to the Archangel Michael to be conducted to the Earthly Paradise. Thus was the audience which witnessed the Passion-play already prepared when, in pantomime, Christ goes to Paradise, summons the patriarchs, and leads them to the place from which he is to ascend. The *Christ* lacks this feature and therefore requires that all explanations be made in the scene itself; and the persons to do this are naturally the angels who alone are cognizant of all the facts. As we compare the two texts it is to be noticed that the play directs that the redeemed must be *indutis vestibus albis*, while lines 447 and 454 of the *Christ* lay special stress on the *hwitum hræglum* of the attendant host.

The scene of the *Dirigierrolle* embraces the dialog-parts numbered 347-358 by Froning (pp. 371 f.).

ADELINE M. JENNEY.

University of Wisconsin.

¹ R. Froning, *Das Drama des Mittelalters*, Zweiter Teil, pp. 371-373.